



SAN FRANCISCO  
OPERA

## **SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CENTER ANNOUNCES 2020 ADLER FELLOWS**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (October 31, 2019) — San Francisco Opera Center Director Sheri Greenawald today announced the 12 recipients of the 2020 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship. Selected from participants of the Merola Opera Program, the ten singers and two pianists/apprentice coaches begin their fellowships in January 2020. The performance-oriented residency offers advanced young artists intensive individual training, coaching and professional seminars, as well as a wide range of performance opportunities. Since its inception in 1977, the prestigious fellowship has nurtured the development of more than 180 young artists, introducing many budding stars to the international opera stage and launching active careers throughout the world as performers, production artists, arts professionals and educators.

The singers selected as 2020 Adler Fellows are sopranos **Anne-Marie MacIntosh** (Langley, British Columbia, Canada), **Elisa Sunshine** (San Clemente, California) and **Esther Tonea** (Buford, Georgia); mezzo-soprano **Simone McIntosh** (Vancouver, Canada); tenors **Zhengyi Bai** (Linyi, China), **Christopher Colmenero** (Burlington, Vermont), **Christopher Oglesby** (Woodstock, Georgia) and **Victor Starsky** (Queens, New York); baritone **Timothy Murray** (Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin); and bass **Stefan Egerstrom** (Brooklyn Center, Minnesota). Anne-Marie MacIntosh, Elisa Sunshine, Esther Tonea, Victor Starsky, Timothy Murray and Stefan Egerstrom are incoming first-year fellows. 2019 Adlers Simone McIntosh, Zhengyi Bai, Christopher Colmenero and Christopher Oglesby continue in the program as second-year fellows.

The pianists selected for Apprentice Coach Fellowships are first-year fellow **Andrew King** (Syracuse, New York) and returning second-year Adler **Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad** (Kyiv, Ukraine). The Adler Fellow apprentice coaches work closely with Mark Morash, Director of Musical Studies of the Opera Center, and John Churchwell, Head of Music Staff at San Francisco Opera. The coaches participate in the musical activities of both San Francisco Opera and the Opera Center and are involved in all aspects of the Adler Fellows' training by acting as pianists for master classes, working with master coaches and preparing the Adler Fellows for concerts and mainstage roles.

Adler Fellows gain valuable professional experience by participating in roles of increasing importance in San Francisco Opera's repertory season at the War Memorial Opera House and via a variety of performance opportunities throughout their fellowship. Upcoming engagements for the 2020 Adler Fellows include the Eureka Chamber Music Festival on January 24 (Eureka, CA); a concert with Brava! Opera Theater on January 26 (Ashland, OR) and the Santa Rosa Chamber Series on March 13 (Santa Rosa, CA). Select Adler Fellows will also be featured in the 2020 Schwabacher Recital Series (January–April 2020), and all of the 2020 Adlers Fellows will take the stage for the annual *The Future Is Now* concert on November 27, 2020.

The 2019 Adlers concluding their fellowships at the end of this year are sopranos Mary Evelyn Hangle and Natalie Image, mezzo-soprano Ashley Dixon, countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, baritone SeokJong Baek, bass-baritone Christian Pursell and pianist César Cañón. **The 2019 Adler Fellows' season culminates with the annual showcase concert *The Future Is Now* on Friday, December 6 at 7:30 p.m. at Herbst Theatre in San Francisco.** The program of arias and operatic scenes features the 2019 class of Adler Fellows accompanied by the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and conducted by Eun Sun Kim, who made a "company debut of astonishing vibrancy and assurance" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) last June leading Dvořák's *Rusalka*. For tickets and more information, visit [sfopera.com](http://sfopera.com).

## 2020 ADLER FELLOW BIOGRAPHIES

### FIRST-YEAR ADLER FELLOWS:

Soprano **Anne-Marie MacIntosh**, praised by *Opera Canada* for her “effervescent coloratura,” “stratospheric notes” and “dramatic vivacity,” was a participant of the 2019 Merola Opera Program, where she performed the role of Diana in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s *If I Were You*. During the 2018–19 season, she made her role debut as Juliette in Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* with Calgary Opera and sang the role of Coloratura in Claude Vivier’s *Kopernikus* with Against the Grain Theatre. MacIntosh is an alumna of the Calgary Opera Emerging Artist Development Program (2016–18), where she performed the roles of Berta (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) and the Shepherd Boy (*Tosca*). She made her professional debut as Barbarina in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at Manitoba Opera. Other operatic credits include Gretel (*Hansel and Gretel*), Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*), Adina (*L’Elisir d’Amore*) and Zerbinetta (*Ariadne auf Naxos*). On the concert stage, her performances include Mahler’s Fourth Symphony with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and Poulenc’s *Gloria* and the finale to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with the Vancouver Oratorio Society and the Vancouver Bach Choir. MacIntosh is a graduate of the University of Manitoba (Master of Music) and the University of British Columbia (Bachelor of Music).

Soprano **Elisa Sunshine** was a participant in the 2019 Merola Opera Program, where she created the role of Selena in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s *If I Were You*. An avid supporter of new works, she performed the role of Madame White Snake in a workshop of Scott Wheeler’s *Naga* at New England Conservatory and sang the role of Elizabeth Christine in Wheeler’s workshop performance of *The Sorrows of Frederick* with the Center for Contemporary Opera in New York City. Her roles include the Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte* (Portland Opera To Go, Brevard Janiec Opera Company and New England Conservatory), Gretel in *Hänsel und Gretel* (Regina Opera), Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Lowell House Opera), Musetta in *La Bohème* (Regina Opera and, in an all-female *La Femme Bohème*, with MetroWest Opera) and Poppea in *Agrippina* (New England Conservatory). Sunshine received her Bachelor of Music degree from DePauw University and a Master of Music and Graduate Diploma from New England Conservatory.

Romanian-American soprano **Esther Tonea** has appeared in concerts and recitals across the United States, Canada and Europe. During her participation in the 2019 Merola Opera Program, she appeared as Diana in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s *If I Were You*. The *San Francisco Chronicle* praised her “magnificent singing—an ardent, tonally plush performance,” and in the Merola Grand Finale concert, she “dazzled as Fiordiligi” (*San Francisco Examiner*) with her “gleaming tones and impeccable dynamic control” (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Tonea’s opera highlights also include the roles of Gilda

(*Rigoletto*), Female Chorus (*The Rape of Lucretia*) and Suor Genovieffa (*Suor Angelica*). She has appeared as soprano soloist in Haydn's *Missa in Angustiis* with the Athens Choral Society, Haydn's *The Creation* with the University of Georgia and Mahler's Symphony No. 4 in San Francisco. In collaboration with the National Orchestral Institute + Festival and Wolf Trap Opera, she performed "Glitter and Be Gay" from *Candide* among other Bernstein hits for their *Bernstein at 100: Pops Extravaganza* performance. Tonia holds a Master of Music in Voice from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees in Vocal Performance and Cello Performance from the University of Georgia.

Tenor **Victor Starsky** is a native of Queens, New York, where he has worked as a teacher, martial artist and musician. Starsky was a participant of the 2019 Merola Opera Program. He has performed Lt. B.F. Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with Long Island Opera and will make his role debut as the Duke (*Rigoletto*) at Opera Modesto. This winter, he will perform Don José in his company debut with Opera Tampa. *Opera Today* wrote: "Victor Starsky's Don José is terrifying and compelling, with a voice that performs vocal acrobatics with strength and beauty that remains undiminished through his final line." Starsky made his Carnegie Hall debut in April 2019 as the tenor soloist in Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*. In 2018, he traveled to Italy to perform the role of Alfredo in *La Traviata*, conducted by Audrey Saint-Gil, and performed Don José with New York Opera Collaborative. Other recent performances include Il Postiglione in *La Fanciulla del West* and Rodolfo in *La Bohème* with New York City Opera, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* and Tony in *West Side Story* with Opera North.

Lauded for his "consistent, attractive baritone" (*Opera News*), **Timothy Murray** sings Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at The Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia this season. As a participant of the 2019 Merola Opera Program, he performed the role of Paul in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *If I Were You* and finished out the summer on the War Memorial Opera House stage singing the title role in a scene from Thomas' *Hamlet* as part of the Merola Grand Finale. In previous seasons, Murray has been seen as William Dale in *Silent Night* with Arizona Opera; Mercutio in *Roméo et Juliette* and the Huntsman in *Rusalka* with The Academy of Vocal Arts; Marullo in *Rigoletto* and the Captain in *Eugene Onegin* with Lyric Opera of Kansas City; Silvio in *Pagliacci* with Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre and Dandini in *La Cenerentola* with City Lyric Opera. On the concert stage, he has sung Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the Oratorio Society of New York, performed Berlioz' *Lélio* with the New Jersey Symphony and premiered a new arrangement of Debussy's *Trois Ballades de François Villon* with the Pacifica String Quartet.

Bass **Stefan Egerstrom** was a participant of the 2019 Merola Opera Program, performing in the Schwabacher Summer Concert and Merola Grand Finale. Egerstrom recently

performed the role of Hunding in *Die Walküre* with Queen City Opera. In 2018, he made his role debut as King René in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* with Queen City Opera. While at University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), he was seen as Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, Siroco in *L'Étoile* and bass soloist in Bach's *Johannes-Passion*. As part of the Opera Fusion: New Works initiative between Cincinnati Opera and CCM, he performed in workshops of Ricky Ian Gordon's *Morning Star* and Gregory Spears' *Fellow Travelers*. Egerstrom has also been a Young Artist with Des Moines Metro Opera, covering the roles of Prince Gremin in *Eugene Onegin* and Il Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*. Other operatic roles include Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Dulcamara in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Grenvil in *La Traviata* and Kecal in *The Bartered Bride*. He received his Bachelor's in Vocal Performance from Lawrence University, and his Master's in Voice from The University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

Pianist **Andrew King** is a recent graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied under Warren Jones and served on the coaching staff. As a participant of the 2019 Merola Opera Program, he was an Apprentice Coach who helped prepare the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *If I Were You* under the baton of Nicole Paiement. Summer 2018 included performances of Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*, Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* and continuo for *Le Nozze di Figaro* with James Conlon, all at Music Academy of the West. King debuted at Carnegie Hall in January 2018 in Marilyn Horne's *The Song Continues*, performing in master classes taught by Horne, Graham Johnson and Renée Fleming. He returned to Carnegie Hall the following year for *SongStudio*, under the leadership of Renée Fleming. King has performed as piano soloist with the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra and the LeMoyne College String Ensemble. He holds a Bachelor's in Vocal Performance from College-Conservatory of Music at University of Cincinnati, where he studied with Bill McGraw and Barbara Honn.

## **SECOND-YEAR ADLER FELLOWS:**

Vancouver-born mezzo-soprano **Simone McIntosh**, a 2018 Merola Opera Program participant and former Ensemble Studio member at the Canadian Opera Company, made her San Francisco Opera debut as Second Wood Nymph in last summer's *Rusalka* and earlier this year sang the title role of *La Cenerentola* at Vancouver Opera. McIntosh has been named winner of competitions, including the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Competition 2016, McGill Wirth Vocal Prize 2016 and Ottawa Choral Society New Discoveries Competition 2017 and she was dubbed one of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "30 Hottest Classical Musicians Under 30" in 2017. Her credits include Tamiri in *Il Re Pastore* (Merola Opera Program); the Page in *Rigoletto* (Canadian Opera Company); Ruggiero in *Alcina*, Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*, Judith in *Bluebeard's Castle*, Meg in *Little Women* and Waitress in *Speed Dating Tonight!* (Opera McGill); Donna in *Crush* (world

premiere at The Banff Centre); Béatrice in *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (MYopera); the Fox in *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Giulietta in *The Tales of Hoffmann* (University of British Columbia Opera); Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Burnaby Lyric Opera) and Cis in *Albert Herring* (Vancouver Opera).

Tenor **Zhengyi Bai** made his Company debut as Remendado in last season's *Carmen* and also appears as the Dancing Master and Lamplighter in this fall's *Manon Lescaut*. Bai was a participant of the 2018 Merola Opera Program, where he appeared as Alessandro in *Il Re Pastore*. He has also performed *Bénédicte* (*Béatrice et Bénédicte*), Oronte (*Alcina*), Nemorino (*L'Elisir d'Amore*), Count Almaviva (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) and Mr. Owen (*Postcard from Morocco*). In 2017, he won the Los Angeles District of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Born in the Shandong province of China, Bai entered college as a piano student. But it was not until his junior year in college that he discovered his true instrument—his voice. With a solid musical foundation of piano study, Bai flourished in his voice studies, completing his bachelor and master's degrees in Shandong, China, and obtaining his graduate certificate from the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music.

Tenor **Christopher Colmenero** made his Company and role debuts as Maintop in *Billy Budd* this fall. As a member of the 2018 Merola Opera Program, he was featured as Luigi in Puccini's *Il Tabarro* for the Schwabacher Summer Concert and sang a scene as the title role of Verdi's *Don Carlo* for the Merola Grand Finale concert. He recently returned to Purchase College as a guest artist to sing Judge Danforth in the Purchase Opera spring production of *The Crucible*. Colmenero was a resident artist with Minnesota Opera during the 2016–17 season, where he performed Benvolio in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* and Froh in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. He was a 3rd place winner in the 2017 Midwestern Regional Finals and a 2016 Eastern District Finals winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Other awards include the Giulio Gari Foundation, Gerda Lissner Foundation and the 2014 Richard F. Gold Career Grant. Colmenero holds an Artist Diploma in Voice/Opera from the Mannes College of Music and Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in Voice/Opera from the Purchase College Conservatory of Music.

Tenor **Christopher Oglesby** made his San Francisco Opera house debut as Dancaïre in *Carmen* last season and this fall sings Benvolio (*Roméo et Juliette*) and Edmondo (*Manon Lescaut*). He was most recently a Resident Artist at Utah Opera where he sang Tybalt in *Roméo et Juliette* and was the tenor soloist for Handel's *Messiah* with the Utah Symphony. As a participant of the 2018 Merola Opera Program, he debuted as Tom Rakewell in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. As an education artist at The Dallas Opera, he appeared in Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne* and Davies' *The Three Little Pigs*. An active soloist and recitalist, Oglesby has performed with the Utah Symphony, Abilene Philharmonic, Dallas

Puccini Society and in the Schwabacher Recital Series at San Francisco Opera Center. He holds Bachelor of Music degrees in Vocal Performance, Choral Education and Band Education from Lee University and a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of North Texas and is a recipient of the Richard F. Gold Career Grant.

**Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad** participated in the 2018 Merola Opera Program. Before graduating with honors from the Special Music School in Kyiv, she won top prizes at various international piano and chamber music competitions, including the Prokofiev International Competition for Young Pianists (Donetsk, Ukraine), the International Competition for Young Pianists (Belgrade, Serbia) and the International Chamber Ensemble Competition (St. Petersburg, Russia). She twice became a national finalist in the MTNA Young Artist Competition, winning 3rd prize in 2011. On the concert stage, Barrad has appeared on numerous occasions with orchestras such as the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra and the Chernigov Symphony Orchestra. Barrad also enjoys a vibrant collaborative career spanning opera, choral music, vocal recitals and chamber music, and she recently held the position of principal coach with Queen City Opera in Cincinnati. With San Francisco Opera, she has been a part of the music staff for productions of *Carmen* and *Manon Lescaut*. She graduated with her Master's in Collaborative Piano from the College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati where she recently completed her Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance studying with Prof. Awadagin Pratt.

### **About San Francisco Opera Center and Merola Opera Program**

**San Francisco Opera Center** was created in 1982 by then-General Director Terence A. McEwen to oversee the operation and administration of the education and training programs initiated by Kurt Herbert Adler in 1954. Providing a coordinated sequence of performance and study opportunities for young artists, San Francisco Opera Center represents a new era in which young artists of major operatic potential can develop through intensive training and performance, under the aegis of a major international opera company. Under the guidance of San Francisco Opera Center Director Sheri Greenawald and San Francisco Opera General Director Matthew Shilvock, the Opera Center has trained and introduced many young stars from around the world to the international opera stage through its resident artist programs.

Initially founded as the San Francisco Opera/Affiliate Artists program in 1977, the **Adler Fellowship Program** is one of the nation's most prestigious performance-oriented residencies for the most advanced young singers and pianists. Each year, Adler Fellows are sponsored by individual donors and institutional funders to help cover the cost of their fellowship, and sponsors affiliated with the Adler Program have the opportunity to attend private studio classes with the Fellows and develop nurturing relationships with them. Alumni from the Adler Fellowship Program include sopranos Jane Archibald, Susannah Biller, Leah Crocetto, Heidi Melton, Melody Moore, Patricia Racette, Nadine Sierra, Ruth Ann Swenson, Elza van den Heever and Deborah Voigt; mezzo-sopranos Zheng Cao, Kendall Gladen, Daveda Karanas, Maya Lahyani, Daniela Mack, Renée Tatum and Dolora Zajick; countertenors Brian Asawa, Ryan Belongie and Gerald Thompson; tenors Andrew Bidlack, Brian Jagde,

Daniel Montenegro, Matthew O'Neill, Sean Panikkar, Alek Shrader and Noah Stewart; baritones Eugene Brancoveanu, Alfredo Daza, Mark Delavan, Austin Kness, Lucas Meachem and James Westman; bass-baritones Joshua Bloom, Ryan Kuster, John Relyea, Philip Skinner, Daniel Sumegi and Dale Travis; and basses John Ames and Kenneth Kellogg.

Widely regarded as the foremost opera training program for aspiring singers, coaches and stage directors, the **Merola Opera Program**, which celebrated its 60th Anniversary in 2017, has served as a proving ground for hundreds of artists. Many Merola alumni are now among the most recognized names in the opera world. Every summer the program offers 29 young artists the rare opportunity of studying, coaching and participating in master classes with established professionals for twelve weeks. Participants also perform in two complete opera productions with orchestra and two summer concerts. Offered free of charge for all participants, the Merola Opera Program is unique in the industry in many ways. Merola is the only young artist program to provide financial support to developing artists for five years following participation. The Merola Opera Program is a financially independent organization with a separate 501(c)3 which operates in close collaboration with the San Francisco Opera Center and San Francisco Opera. In addition, only Merola graduates are considered for participation in the San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship program.

For more information on the San Francisco Opera Center, Adler Fellowship and Merola Opera Program, visit [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com) and [merola.org](https://merola.org).

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This press release and photographs of the 2020 Adler Fellows are available at <https://sfopera.com/about-us/press-room/press-releases/2020-Adler-Fellows/>.

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